

READY TO LEARN PROVIDENCE

Fall 2003

A Message From the Director

Welcome to the first issue of the R2LP newsletter!

The articles in this first issue highlight some of our efforts and strategies to transform early care and education in the city. I hope you enjoy them and feel inspired to become more involved.

The vision for Ready to Learn Providence is that all children in Providence will enter school healthy and ready to learn. As you will notice from our logo, Ready to Learn Providence has chosen "READY" as our operative word. Over the next few months, you will begin to hear this word throughout the community.

"READY" is a pledge to the community to expand services for all children. "READY" is a commitment to promote policy changes that make early care and education services more responsive to the needs of children and families. And, "READY" is a promise to help early care and education providers expand their knowledge to create improved learning environments for our children.

At this point, I want to extend a big thank you to the individuals and organizations who are the heart and soul of this initiative.

T2K in Providence

What is T2K? T2K, or "Transition to Kindergarten", refers to a new R2LP initiative with the Providence Public School Department (PPSD). T2K is about supporting children, their parents, caregivers, and the early care and education community as children transition into kindergarten.

What is special about T2K in Providence?

The R2LP-PPSD partnership is resulting in exciting changes at PPSD. Among them is the creation of a new position of Facilitator for Early Childhood Education. Paulajo Gaines Mays, Facilitator, sees her role as a bridge for communication between the early care community and the school department. In her opinion it's about partnership: "Everyone working with young children is doing their absolute best to meet the needs of kids and families before they reach school and once they enter kindergarten. Now we need to pull together to see ourselves as one body dedicated to improving outcomes for all children."

What will happen this year? Paulajo is working with the T2K Advisory Committee to assess the current challenges to transition in Providence and consider successful models elsewhere in the nation. The group will develop brochures that discuss educational expectations for children entering kindergarten and that explain the kindergarten enrollment process - what to expect, where to go, what to bring.

How can I learn more? If you have any questions or suggestions, please contact Paulajo Gaines Mays at 278-2881 or paulajo.mays@ppsd.org. We look forward to the assistance of all who are concerned with the well-being and adjustment of our young children as we work to make the transition a smooth and hopeful time in our children's lives.

We salute the commitment of..

- The families who have given up their days and nights to attend focus groups and meetings and offer us their wisdom and support.
- The early care and education providers who have enthusiastically attended trainings at the end of a long day's work.
- The Providence Public Library Children's staff who have worked tirelessly to invent and reinvent programs responsive to the needs of families.
- The Providence School Department staff who have provided a welcome home for our new Facilitator for Early Childhood Education.
- The CHILDSPAN staff and facilitators who have embraced and implemented *HeadsUp! Reading*.
- The community-based organizations that have graciously hosted our meetings and trainings.
- The funders and community, state and national leaders who have provided the insight, resources and support to get this ambitious project off the ground. - *Joyce Butler, R2LP Director*



Joyce Butler, R2LP Director, with Paulajo Gaines Mays, Facilitator for Early Childhood Education

Funding for R2LP is made possible by:

US Department of Health and Human Services

Hasbro Charitable Trust

RI Department of Health

Annie E. Casey Foundation

Health and Education Leadership for Providence (HELP)

United Way of Rhode Island

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HeadsUp! Reading

Ready to Learn Providence is thrilled to report on the successful start of *HeadsUp! Reading*, a 15-week professional development course that helps improve childhood learning by training childcare professionals in research-based early literacy practices. The local trainings, delivered via satellite TV, began on September 8 to a total of 75 family home providers and center employees at five different locations around Providence.

Classes meet once a week through December and are offered in both English and Spanish. The course will be offered again in the spring, allowing for an additional 75 participants.

HeadsUp! Reading is operated by the

National Head Start Association, and R2LP has sub-contracted with CHILDSPAN, to coordinate the effort.

Tania Quezada is the local *HeadsUp! Reading* coordinator based at CHILDSPAN.

Within just two days of advertising the course, Tania received 120 phone calls from providers interested in the classes, and all 150 available slots were taken within a week. "Home care providers really want to give the best care possible, and they want some guidance to be most effective. In my conversations with participants, I keep hearing 'It's about time there are classes for me!'" Of the 75 participants this term, 80% of them are family home care providers. The majority of them are Latina and they live in most of the city's south- and west-side neighborhoods.

According to recent data from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Rhode Island has the largest percentage of Latino children living in poverty in the United States. *HeadsUp! Reading* is deliberately targeting its resources to meet this child population while filling the unmet training needs of family home care providers in the neighborhoods.

Thelma Jimenez, a Spanish-speaking participant at the Textron Chamber of Commerce site, has been providing childcare for toddlers at her home in Providence for six years. As a mother of two school-

age children, she values working with children and helping them learn in their early, formative years. She enrolled in *HeadsUp! Reading* to educate herself on early literacy and to help her provide the best care possible. Her philosophy is, "The more kids can learn, the better off they will be."

When Thelma started providing childcare in 1997, she immediately created a small library space for the children. She stocked it with appropriate books and made sure they were within reach of small hands. After just two weeks of *HeadsUp! Reading* class, Thelma has already made some small changes that produced big results. She put up a sign in English and Spanish that identifies the space as the "Reading Place" and she placed child-sized table and chairs in the space to make it more appealing and accessible

to the children. "Now, as soon as the kids come in each morning, they head right for the books! And every week I leave class with new ideas" - practical ideas that she can easily implement to help children become more interested in and excited about learning.

"Providers really want to give the best care possible, and they want some guidance to be most effective."

*- Tania Quezada,
Program Coordinator*

What Makes *HeadsUp! Reading* Unique?

- ✓ Providence joins 8 states as the *first city* in the nation to offer *HeadsUp! Reading*.
- ✓ Ready to Learn Providence is sponsoring this innovative training at no cost to participants while also providing a small stipend to help cover transportation, childcare, or other expenses.
- ✓ The sessions combine national experts with locally trained facilitators to make the information relevant and useful.
- ✓ Training is delivered in five neighborhood locations at times that make attendance possible for busy childcare providers.
- ✓ Three of the five sessions are offered entirely in Spanish. This includes all materials, facilitation, and instruction.
- ✓ Participants can earn professional development credits and R2LP is now negotiating for college credit with URI and CCRI .

HeadsUp! Reading is made possible through the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services and a grant from the Hasbro Charitable Trust.



Home care provider Maria Whatts shares an idea with Tania Quezada during a *HeadsUp! Reading* class at Textron Academy.

Many Thanks to the following *HeadsUp! Reading* host sites:

Federal Hill House

Genesis Center

Intown YMCA

Nickerson House

Textron Chamber of Commerce Academy

At the Libraries...

Ready to Learn Providence and the Providence Public Library have embarked on a new partnership with *Cradle to Crayons* (C2C) as a primary focus. Offered since 1998, C2C is a nine-week, parent-child workshop designed to introduce the library in a friendly setting where parents and children can meet, talk, and play together.

Cradle to Crayons is offered at six library branches and, since beginning the partnership, library staff have also conducted the program off-site at two Providence Housing Authority sites, Hartford Park and Chad Brown. These additional sites were selected to offer the program at times and places that are convenient for families.

C2C enables parents to learn about their children's learning and development needs through conversations with local experts. "The partnership with R2LP has inspired the library to be more responsive to the participants' needs," says Erica Wilder, Assistant Coordinator of Children's Programs. "We have expanded our pool of experts who can talk with parents about child development issues that are of interest to them." Some popular topics include nutrition, behavior, and choosing quality childcare.

Attendance at the Smith Hill and Olneyville/Hartford Park sites increased recently, thanks in part to the efforts of bilingual outreach aides Carolina Briones and Paola Benitez. Carolina and Paola promote C2C to diverse populations throughout Providence through the media (*Providence En Español*, Poder radio station), visits to agencies and churches, and attendance at festivals. While outreach remains a great challenge, their parent-focused recruitment efforts have made a real difference.

PPL's Children's Services staff believe passionately in the importance of reading to children, especially the very young. This summer and fall staff have worked with early literacy expert Marcia Moon. The training combines purposeful play and modeling conversations to expand vocabulary and book knowledge. Staff are learning key facts to communicate to parents about the crucial importance of early literacy while gaining knowledge about the essentials of reading aloud, songs, rhyming, phonological awareness, and meaningful conversations.

"Knowing the depth of educational expectations of children when they first enter school, the library has a natural opportunity to model and share strategies using quality books with families that will help make children school ready," says Marcia Moon.



Children enjoying a story during Cradle to Crayons at Knight Memorial Library with Michael Chuon, Children's Librarian.

"The partnership with R2LP has inspired the library to be more responsive to participants' needs."

- Erica Wilder, PPL

The staff's expanded capacity will not only impact C2C, but will also enrich all of the library's children's programs and parent interactions.

Another critical piece that Marcia has assisted with is PPL's collection of bilingual books. A team has been meeting to review and select appropriate bilingual and English-Spanish partner book sets so that all of the branches can promote bilingual literacy. These collections will increase in the next few months.

Finally, PPL continues to improve the physical spaces where C2C sessions are held to make them more inviting for families. Spaces are undergoing surface renovations including the additions of homemade alphabets, bright carpets and helpful signage to lead families to the program.

The R2LP-PPL partnership seeks to:

- ✓ Encourage early childhood and family literacy
- ✓ Increase library use by families
- ✓ Provide professional development opportunities to staff at all of the library branches.

**For information on PPL's children's programs:
call the Children's Room at 455-8025
or visit www.provlib.org**

Spotlight: Jackie Jackson

Jackie Jackson is a busy lady. She works several days a week as a Parent Engagement Consultant for R2LP and also serves in a similar role at the RI Department of Health. When she's not at work, she's a student pursuing her Master's in Social Work with a focus on elderly concerns. And of course, there's her pride and joy - 11-year-old son, Kieray.

Jackie's job with R2LP is to reach out to parents, engage them in the R2LP activities, and stay connected with them. She spends a lot of her days on the phone with parents, providing what she calls "the personal touch". For many of the parents, she has become a vital connection to opportunities in the community. Her position with R2LP is funded by the Rhode Island Parent Information Network and she comes to R2LP "on loan" from the Department of Health.

When asked what she likes most about her work with R2LP, Jackie says, "Everything! I'm a people person, so I love working with the parents, and I love working with kids. It's great to see the smile on people's faces, and to help parents understand how important they are."

Her enthusiasm for her work has been met with success. In June, R2LP held a wonderful "Parents Night Out" that drew about 30 parents and 45 children to Dorcas Place for a spe-

cial evening of reading. Parents received advice on selecting appropriate books and reading techniques to encourage interest among children. Families each took home a number of new books, courtesy of Reach Out and Read Rhode Island and R2LP.



Jackie Jackson, R2LP Parent Engagement Consultant

Most recently, Jackie helped the Providence Public Library organize and conduct successful focus groups. Conducted in Khmer, Spanish, and English the input will help PPL better serve the needs of Providence's diverse communities. Jackie is also working with the Transition to Kindergarten and Early Learning Report Card committees to engage parents in these extremely important conversations.

R2LP is fortunate to have Jackie on our team, and we so appreciate her extraordinary efforts, enthusiasm, and the wonderful, personal touch she brings to all of our activities!

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SAVE THE DATE

Upcoming R2LP Local Council Meetings - January 22 & April 22, 2004
10:00 AM at Casey Family Services